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AGRICULTURAL HISTORY is designed as a medium for the publication of research and documents pertaining to the history of agriculture in all its phases and as a clearing house for information of interest and value to workers in the field. Materials on the history of agriculture in all countries are included, and also materials on institutions, organizations, and sciences which have been factors in agricultural development.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Joseph Schafer ("Some Enduring Factors in Rural Polity") has been superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and editor of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* since 1920. During 1931-32 he served as president of the Agricultural History Society. His eminence in the field of agricultural history is largely due to his work in connection with the Wisconsin Domesday Book, a plan by which the history of local communities in Wisconsin, and first of all rural communities, is being studied intensively. "The records used, and the process of study of rural towns, make possible certain generalizations about the agricultural history of Wisconsin." Therein lies the significance of the Domesday Book project and its methods for agricultural historians. For a list of Dr. Schafer's articles describing this survey, see *Agricultural History*, 6:41-42 (January, 1932). His book, *A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin* (Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1922) constitutes the general introduction to, and volume one of, the *General Studies* of the *Wisconsin Domesday Book* and is a valuable sketch of the history of Wisconsin agriculture. *Four Wisconsin Counties, Prairie and Forest* (Madison, 1927) and *The Wisconsin Lead Region* (Madison, 1932) have been issued as volumes two and three of the *General Studies*. The latter work, a historical study of Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette counties in southwestern Wisconsin, combines the history of an important extractive industry, lead mining, with the history of the region's agriculture.

SOME ENDURING FACTORS IN RURAL POLITY¹

JOSEPH SCHAFER

Is agriculture at the crossroads? The affirmative of the debate on this subject has hitherto been largely publicized, revealing the pessimistic spirit in which the farmer's situation is viewed today by many of those politicians, scientists, and economists who feel authorized to prescribe for the ailing and suffering patient. This tone being a denial of that which prevailed as late as thirteen years ago, the need of a longer perspective is indicated.²

The historian modestly restricts his function in social therapeutics to the isolation of germs, leaving the discovery of serums to colleagues in the social science field. As member of a professional guild, however, he is bound to regard his mode of approach as furnishing the most natural preliminary analysis of any great time-tangled interest and this service he can proffer, with heartiness and humility, to the anxious farmers of America.

Rural institutions are manifold, their economic-social foundation is unitary: nothing more and nothing less than the family farm. Here is a phenomenon as ancient as civilization itself, with roots worming back into the customs of barbarous nomads, and the primitive food-growing habits of savages become sessile in areas of exceptional productiveness. Beginning in the teeming alluvion along some of the world's great rivers, the family farm

¹ The presidential address before the Agricultural History Society at its fifteenth annual meeting in Washington, D. C., on April 15, 1932.

² The present agricultural depression dates from the tragic break in prices of farm productions in 1920 which closed a twenty-four year period of prosperity for American farmers. That era, in turn, had been preceded by a depression which was nearly continuous from 1875 to 1897. To illustrate: The per-acre value of farm productions, considering only cultivated land, which in 1870 stood at \$10.35, dropped to \$7.79 in 1880 and to \$7.00 in 1890. By 1900 it had risen to \$11.45. In 1910 crops alone yielded a value of \$16.30 per improved-acre and \$27.45 in 1920. In each case, of course, the census reports the figures for the preceding year.

gradually spread, with the growth of knowledge and skill in land tillage, until it covered most of the habitable portions of Asia, Europe, and America. It is suggestive that in geography the term "habitable," is used interchangeably with "successfully cultivable."

The family farm, in a world view, has been any tract of land from which the occupant, usually domiciled upon it, drew the main support for his family by cultivating the soil. He might be a serf, a squatter, a tenant at the will of some landlord, holder of a short-term lease, a long-term lease, or a fee simple title. Areas varied more than kinds of tenure, and students of Blackstone find these infinite. The Roman Cincinnatus plowed his four acres on the banks of the Tiber; American would-be Cincinnatuses have tilled areas at least a hundred times as large in valleys of the Western Continent.

The most searching question that can be asked about the social conditions of any country or period has reference to the kind of family farm that is typical of its rural society. The visitor to Stratford-on-Avon who cares to do more than gaze upon the Shakespeare birthhouse, the New Place, Ann Hathaway's cottage, the theatre, and the library can find, just beyond the Avon mill, a well-kept farm of 150 acres whose operator leases the land at an annual rental of two pounds per acre. In the gold value of 1928 that was about ten dollars; today it would be nearer seven dollars. He follows a four-course rotation, with clover, wheat, oats, and roots; keeps cows to supply milk for the London market, feeds a few cattle for beef, a few sheep, a few hogs; and raises special money crops like potatoes or table peas. His labor costs as much as the rent, and rates or taxes one fourth as much. Commercial fertilizer has to be covered in his annual investment, also fattening feeds like American corn or barley, and oil meal, beet pulp, or cocoanut meal for the cows. Nevertheless, he succeeds in making a generous living for his family, keeps his hired help in a state of decency, and sometimes has a small surplus to reinvest.

This man has the air and impress of a gentleman. The land he cultivates, although settled and farmed for a thousand years,

still produces 45 bushels of wheat to the acre and other, more-paying crops in proportion. That fact, and his command of capital or credit, explains his economic status which, in turn, produces a complicated set of reactions upon his personal and family life.

Across the Irish Sea, in the western part of County Tipperary, lived four years ago an aged couple on a tract of 22 acres, all arable. Like the Warwick County farm just described, the property is a leasehold. This Irish farmer keeps fourteen cows, carrying the whole milk to a separating station, and bringing back the skim milk to feed his calves for vealing and a few pigs to be sold as tender shoats, perhaps to serve for Christmas roasts in England's great houses. He grows a little wheat for bread, some potatoes, and oats for a pair of ponies. Most of his land is in permanent pasture, of the lush south of Ireland description, the cows obtaining full feed from it in summer and part feed in winter. He is compelled, however, to buy hay, a heavy charge upon his cash income. Still, he gets along, has enough plain food, decent clothing, and manages to pay rent and taxes with the aid of what his youngest daughter can earn serving in Dublin as lady's maid. This Irish farmer has reared a family of thirteen children, several of the sons emigrating, at the proper age, to America, while a succession of five daughters served as lady's maids.

Life for these good people, unlike that of the young Englishman of Shakespeare's country, is on the peasant level. They have the peasant struggle to make ends meet, the peasant deprivations, the peasant thrift, and the peasant outlook upon the world. It is not certain that native endowments are inferior in this case to those in the other; they may perhaps be superior. Yet the farmer on 22 acres of rich Irish soil is obviously in a different social class from the farmer of 150 fertile English acres and the reason, disregarding minor contributory elements, seems to lie in the size of the holding. The casual traveler through the "Golden Vein," in another part of Tipperary County, notes a similar difference between its farms of from one hundred to two hundred acres of land, grouped in large fields and meadows, and the cultivators of small tracts with their walled-in, Lilliputian subdivisions.

The span of recorded time in America is short compared to that in England or in Ireland, and the course of rural history, in most respects, very different. Fluid social conditions, and the steady pull of free lands, have generally permitted the small cultivator of one decade, if reasonably ambitious, to become a large cultivator in the next. But such transitions are no longer quite normal and there are indubitable tendencies threatening the ultimate reproduction of something like the Old World farming classes among the free cultivators of America.

Doubtless every country-bred person of fifty years or over can recall farms which yielded a generous living and permitted both economic and social advancement to the operating family; while, on the other hand, families on smaller or poorer holdings suffered a decline in relative importance through being poorly paid for their labors on the soil.

It is not necessary to go to the pine barrens in order to find proof that the land itself, when unfavorable, is the most relentless of all the "tyrannies" to which the lives of farmers can be subjected. The terms "favorable" and "unfavorable" stand for both the fertility and the unit amplitude of the lands from which individual farmers draw their support. Farms are favorable when they have adequate areas of productive soil under the varying forms of arable, meadow or pasture, woodland, orchard, etc., *as related to the current modes of land utilization*. A farm of a thousand acres, by reason of infertility, often has proved incapable of supporting a family. But, on the other hand, the fattest of fertile farm lands, even in the incomparable Mississippi valley, when rationed il-liberally among a group of cultivators, has left all of them meagerly provided with the means of livelihood.

The Rhine Valley is one of the most fertile regions of Europe. Yet, so distressed did its farmers become because the custom of dividing family properties among the children had made most holdings too petty, that in the nineteenth century they sought a remedy in wholesale emigration to America. In this country farm acreages have usually been so generous, in comparison with those of Europe, that reformers have been disposed to advocate smaller farms rather than larger, a policy which is probably sound

in the main but subject to numerous exceptions, as selected examples will show. It is hardly necessary to add that areas which are inadequate under one system of farm economy may be bountiful or even excessive under another.

Much has been learned about the condition of Wisconsin farmers from the improved census schedules devised by General Francis A. Walker for the tenth revision of the great national Domesday survey. Each one of his sheets is designed to permit the description of ten distinct farms and the effort was made to cover all the productions that could be measured or estimated, so as to have a summary of every farmer's income. The result, though the best we have, still falls short of supplying a complete economic classification of the farmers named. The census blanks, like the standard fisherman's nets, let through the little fish which, however, instead of dropping back into their native element drift off toward the farmer's table.

Fifty years ago, more invariably than today, the average farmer's yearly returns made two distinct incomes. One of these was definite enough to be stated in dollars, being the aggregate of the several field crops produced and livestock sold or consumed. Since he paid three or four cents for every bushel of wheat run into the bags, the farmer knew how much of that marketable cereal he produced, as also of other "small grains." But more or less random guesses had to be supplied for his crops of corn, hay, potatoes, milk, butter, cheese, and eggs. It follows that the government's "estimated value of all productions sold, consumed, or on hand," was a summary varying in trustworthiness as the minds that made it, though the relative situations of different farmers and groups of farmers are revealed with sufficient clearness.

A wide range of minor farm and household productions, however, lay wholly outside the official inquest. Though it is not too much to say that in this "twilight zone" the question of success or failure was often decided, their computation would have challenged the wizardry of the modern "C.P.A." What could be set down as the money equivalent of a summer and winter's provision of vegetal foods for a family of ten; of the home supplies of beef,

milk, bacon, mutton, and poultry; of a cellar stocked with filled barrels, casks, jars, firkins and glass containers; the bags of dried corn and dried fruits suspended from the rafters? How shall he compute the value which the tireless housewife puts into the making of bedding from home-grown down and wool, into sewn and knitted garments, into home manufactures like candles and soap? In those pre-contract days the high-class homemaker, by managing the garden, poultry, and dairy, purveying for cellar, pantry, and smoke-house, and festooning the attic with sheaves of medicinal herbs, kept her family bountifully fed, decently clad, and free from most common ailments. And all this with the aid of a cash outlay the smallness of which we can no longer appreciate.

This indeterminate factor in the returns for the farmer's industry, intimately affecting as it did the welfare of the household, accounted for noteworthy differences among families irrespective of the mensurable productions recordable in the census. People could "live well," as the saying was, with very little calculable income, a fact which is still being demonstrated among the vestigial New Englanders, selected groups of mountaineers, north, south, and west, and not a few small farmers, native and foreign, scattered widely over the United States. Such survivals of an agrarian system once the predominant type of farming, are worthy of careful study, particularly in times like the present. They afford glimpses of the second and impregnable line of defense to which a harried rural army can always retire.

Suppose, for a moment, that the farmers of the country agree to retire behind that defense two or three months; with wise leadership and a steady morale they could settle the farm problem on a durable basis, and that without picketing the roads or using force in any way. Should they, for an initial move, decide that those merchants who will pay them, in goods or cash, forty cents per dozen for eggs, would get their trade, the great majority could thereby obtain indispensable supplies while working out their program with reference to farm products generally, to the question of mortgage indebtedness, the debenture, or some other plan of dealing with exportable surpluses, the president-controlled

adjustment of the tariff on such products as may be affected by importations from abroad. Henry Clay tried to secure a balance between agriculture and manufactures, providing a "home market" for what the American farmer produced. His plan was sound, but he was just a century too early to carry it into effect. Can it be done now? That will depend on the willingness of the farmers to unite on some program and then hang together, relying upon their home supplies for support as long as may be necessary. English kings, during the Middle Ages, "lived off their own." They moved, with their households, officials, and retainers from one to another of the king's estates, consuming what had been produced on each in turn. They could live because they had grain, pork, and game. By showing a willingness to "live off their own" the farmers, armed with the ballot and holding the key to the nation's commissary department, can make themselves the actual "kings" of America.³

It is, however, productions which can be turned into money that constitute the dynamic factor in farm life. The family that has only cash enough to pay inescapable overhead, and buy absolute essentials in the way of shoes, clothing, groceries, and school books, can maintain itself for a time, but it will not get ahead, and at last there must come the fateful sagging back to the peasant plane of thought and feeling. On the other hand, the prospering family, especially the producer of some staple for which the world's ports are open,—witness the colonial tobacco grower, the later cotton planter, the western wheat farmer, and cattle king,—having freedom to expand its wants, can build itself up both economically and socially.

Now, the government's records enable us to determine the conditions under which generous farm incomes were made, and it should not surprise us that the basic fact in this connection is the *size of the farm*.

In the census year 1880 a southern Wisconsin county, imperial in extent, had within its borders 4,100 farmers. As a whole, they

³ This paragraph, added in the proof, was inspired by the Governors' Conference held at Sioux City, Iowa, September 10, 1932, to consider the demands of Middle West farmers.

were considered prosperous, the area occupied being one of the most favorable in the state, and the population as good as the best. Yet only 123 of these farmers, or three per cent, made census incomes amounting to \$2,000 clear of overhead expenses. An estimate based on a hand count of all incomes in certain typical towns shows that about $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent made as much as \$1,000 clear. All the rest, nearly 3,600 of the 4,100, had to be content with marketable productions which, after paying taxes, interest, wages, building-repair, and machinery, left them, on the average, less than \$200,—potentially a frugal living and nothing more. When we find that the $87\frac{1}{2}$ per cent farmed, on the average, 100 acres, while those in the \$1,000 income class had 270 and the \$2,000 farmers 356 acres, the comparison becomes impressive.

The Good Book invokes a curse upon the man who removes his neighbor's landmarks, yet an abundant story literature has developed in Europe around the technique of shifting boundary stones, or in plain terms, stealing farm land. While American farmers would not steal land (unless it could be done under the forms of law) they often honor the Hoosier commandment: "Git a plenty while you're a gittin'," and breach the spirit of the Decalogue in "coveting" what "jines" theirs. The reason is the same in both cases: a farm that is too small cannot be operated economically and becomes a millstone on the farmer's neck.

It does not follow from this that profits will advance indefinitely with acreage. He who unguardedly makes that inference will find himself battling the disconcerting law of diminishing returns. That farmer is either wise or lucky who discerns what size of farm can be operated most profitably, and procures himself one having the correct number of acres. This, what we may call *normal* size, will naturally vary with the time, the mode of tillage, and the kind of productions. In Grant County fifty years ago the most successful of those in the two-thousand-dollar-income class were not the holders of the largest tracts but rather those who owned considerably less than the average number of acres for their class. It was found that the ten who had the very largest of the business-income farms, made smaller net returns than the ten having the smallest of those farms. The morale of the

second group was decidedly superior. They were obviously the type of farmers who, in the language of Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission, could be depended upon "to develop and maintain on our farms a civilization in full harmony with the best American ideals." Shall we not add: no other type of farmer can be counted on for such a result?

Have we perhaps found, in this group, the operators of *normal farms* so far as Grant County was concerned at the date of the tenth census,—farms which were large enough to engage the cultivator's fullest powers, yet not large enough to harass and dissipate them? If so, the area of the normal farm, for that time and region, was not the county average of one hundred and forty odd acres, nor yet the Congressional norm, fixed for preëmtors and later for homesteaders. Instead of being able to live independently on his quarter section, defying merchants, bankers, and all "monopolists," according to the agrarian tradition, our genuinely progressive and independent farmer needed one hundred and sixty acres with another eighty joined thereto.

The ten farms in question were managed in ways that were normal to that country and period. Their operators were "general" farmers. Only two of them indulged at all in what could be called a specialty. Those men, tilling the picturesque slopes along the Mississippi, had been prompted, by memories of their native Rhineland, to set out vineyards which, in 1879, contributed appreciable quantities of wine toward the aggregate income. But they were exceptions. The regular sources of the generous farm incomes we are applauding were far less romantic. If two, who were inheritors of an ancient mystery, happened to be able to grow grapes, the normal crops, understood by all and fully adapted to soil and climate, were corn, oats, and clover, transmuted into gold, silver, and legal tender greenbacks by the farmer's good fairy, the pig, whose magic was rather more potent than it is today.

Pork was the principal money crop, though all these farmers raised a few cattle, kept a few cows, made a little butter, and sold some beef. Unlike the other group of ten, those on the largest of the business-income farms, who bought, fed, and sold cattle,

they did not speculate but restricted their investments and limited their activities to legitimate production and direct sale of what they produced. Nor did they manifest exceptional gifts for their business. Their crop schedules reveal no startling results of cultivation; there are no records of bumper crops of corn or oats, or unusual yields of clover seed. The average farmer, given equally good land in approximately equivalent amounts, could apparently have done equally as well as this small group.

If our inference is correct, the results of the historical investigation herein summarized are seen to be of far-reaching application. Demonstrating once more the virtue of the golden mean in human affairs, they suggest that had Congress chanced to fix upon three eighties instead of two as the normal acreage for a freehold in southern Wisconsin, while the number of farms in Grant County would probably have been reduced somewhat, the average net incomes of those having agricultural holdings there in 1880 might have been several times as large as the census taker found them. Of course, it would be invidious to criticize Congress for failing to establish a scientific norm for homesteads when those most concerned about the welfare of the cultivating class had reached no agreement on that subject. The guess that 160 acres was about right for the average farm doubtless chimed with existing public opinion in the country at large and, over the space of a century, it has proved out for at least one type of farm.

That Congress committed a serious error in adopting the Procrustean rule of a uniform area for all homesteads, on whatever kind of soil, under every variety of climate, has long been recognized and officially confessed. Speculator lynchings, range wars, and timber-land frauds were among the inescapable by-products of that policy. The country was too big for it, its soils and climates too diverse and contradictory in character. In any given township, not to speak of a county or a state, one quarter section may easily be worth, for farming purposes, more than two adjacent quarters. And since, in every newly opened district, it was only the first comers who were able to secure approximately the kinds and amounts of land that guaranteed a profitable business in view of the customary habits of tillage, later arrivals taking what they

could get, readjustments have always been left to chance, to time, and especially to social and economic cataclysms.

Society, as represented by the state, ought to have been deeply concerned in the outcome, for, obviously, the only farming community that can carry a flaming torch in the pageant of civilization is one which truly prospers economically. Yet the state has done little or nothing to facilitate, direct, or hasten the curing of defects in the vital matter of farm areas. The decade 1880-1890, for example, witnessed a veritable exodus of Wisconsin farmers who went to Dakota, western Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. The majority of those in Grant County who then sold their properties and emigrated, as might be expected, were holders of inferior or small tracts. The aggregate of these, however, was so large that, had there been a clear comprehension of existing possibilities and an organized effort to realize them, incalculable benefits might have accrued to the country through the creation of a large additional number of normal or adequate farms. Hundreds of owners of medium but undersized tracts, if credit facilities had permitted the desired expansion, would gladly have absorbed an adjacent small farm, thus insuring a proper basis for their own future operations. On the other hand, in this general shake-up, farms representing the triumph of greed over wisdom could frequently have been divided. Even under the *laissez-faire* policy in vogue, so many distinct holdings were merged that the total number in the county was reduced appreciably and their average size increased. No doubt a few were thereby corrected to a profitable norm. But in a period of such rapid changes as the early 1880's witnessed, and when farm land was almost a drug on the market, the absence of a conscious policy of readjusting farm boundaries in the interest of a permanent farm economy, with its consequent enrichment of rural life, was a grave misfortune.

The reason for this failure must be sought in the then still dominant tendency to look upon agriculture from the agrarian point of view as merely a way by which the slow-moving multitude gets its living. Farming was not yet generally regarded as a business, like keeping store or making knife blades, and it could

be carried on without either single entry or double entry book-keeping. In popular thought, it was the residue of the non-business-like and non-professional people who recruited the farming class.

Rural improvement propaganda in those days was no less vigorous, varied, and universal than at present. All the agricultural states had an active press. Wisconsin had her *Farmer*, and in 1885, William D. Hoard began publishing his *Dairyman*, while the farmers' institutes began to function at the same time. A number of out-of-state farm journals circulated through the rural neighborhoods. Orange Judd's *American Agriculturist*, issuing from Broadway, New York, had been a regular visitor in many homes for a quarter of a century. Through its attractive pages Wisconsin youth, living on land worth from twelve to twenty-five dollars per acre, learned the intriguing stories of how John Johnston tile-drained his clayey-upland, New York farm at a cost of perhaps fifty dollars per acre, how Joseph Harris of Rochester imported pure-bred Essex pigs and raised better clover hay than "The Deacon," how "Tim Bunker" down Cape Cod way amused the shiftless neighbors on a cold winter day by carding his warmly housed, sensitive cattle. They learned also that Colonel George E. Waring of Ogden Farm, Litchfield, Connecticut, kept pure-bred Jerseys and sold "gilt-edged" butter to fancy hotels at one dollar per pound when their own painstaking mothers were getting, as a top price, twenty-five cents.

Such preaching had its place. Journals like the *American Agriculturist* exerted a powerful inspirational influence toward a better, especially a more intensive, agriculture, destined to be the salvation of thousands of eastern cultivators for whom fate had fixed too narrow boundaries. Many of their suggestions were applicable to western conditions also, but mainly as remedies for an ailment which ought to have been avoided.

The average farmer, like the blacksmith, brick layer, and every other worker, is habituated to a system of activities for which custom is mainly responsible, and John Dewey has well said: "The nature of habit is to be assertive, insistent, self-perpetuating." Scientific management in industry has demonstrated a thousand

times how simple is the problem of speeding up activity along habitual lines, how discouraging the endeavor to change its direction. In agriculture we encounter the same stubborn facts of human nature. Up to a certain point, the tempo of farm life can be heightened by an enlargement of its scope. The man who undertakes the management of more land, to a reasonable amount, will not change his process but accelerate his pace. His sense of importance, responsibility, and leadership will sharpen his mental reactions as well as quicken his muscles, rendering all operations prompter and more effective. On the reverse side, every departure from the habitual has to be paid for in a temporary slowing down of activity, in fumbling, uncertainty, and perhaps disgust. We have but to watch the worried efforts of general farmers to become fruit growers to convince ourselves on this point. Even the gentle shift to intensive dairying is awkward to make and costs years of apprenticeship.

To advocate 240-acre farms for all and sundry would be quite as unwarranted as it was for the government to give to all comers 160 acres. Normal areas for the general farmer will necessarily differ from those for the wheat farmer, and these again from those of the man who follows some specialty requiring intensive tillage. Each class of cultivators will do best on tracts which, in size and quality, are adapted to their peculiar set of habits. Fifty-acre farms would be large enough for a class of operators trained to get the most out of them, if they could be assured of a market for produce made by their favorite methods. Orchardists, market gardeners, and berry growers are content with small areas which, however, often yield large returns. Knowledge and skill, added to natural adaptation will turn the trick. Customarily, however, those found puttering around on the small farms are precisely the types of men who are least fitted for small-scale farming,—men who, in many cases, could be reclaimed and rendered efficient by increasing their cruising range. The shift from a small Wisconsin hill farm to a large Dakota prairie farm in the 1880's incidentally reconstructed the lives of hundreds of farmers.

If the petty cultivator happens to be a man capable of developing a specialty, even in the department of livestock economy, he

can accomplish surprising results on a very limited acreage. Hiram Smith's ambition to keep one hundred cows on as many acres was not unreasonable. Tillamook tideland pastures, fifty acres in extent, will bountifully feed more than that number of cows for at least eight months in the year. The all-important question is, what will the cows produce? If the Irish peasant, on his twenty-two acres, were milking fourteen of the highest quality British Friesian, Roan Durham, Guernsey, or Jersey cows, instead of indifferent mongrels, he might hope to increase the receipts from milk alone by five or six hundred dollars, and such a margin over his present returns would spell prosperity.

The ideal farming community is one in which all who require generous amounts of land are provided with good-size farms, others with such tracts as they prefer, and where the practice of extensive cultivation is paralleled by a steady effort to secure quality results: extension matched by intension. In Wisconsin, probably the nearest approach to such a community in 1880 was the Swiss town of New Glarus, in Green County, then just a generation old. The founding itself represents a purposive social act on the part of the mountain canton of Glarus, at the time seriously over-populated and seeking the relief which only emigration could afford. At the public charge, the home authorities sent commissioners to America to select land and help in planting the settlement. They also caused the organization of an emigration society which raised funds and recruits for the venture. Operations began when they had lands amounting to only twenty acres per family which for two years they worked in common, with a breaking team of oxen owned in common. This was good training for the social activity which has rendered these Swiss farmers and their descendants so noteworthy in Wisconsin's agricultural development.

Money for the first land-purchase had been lent them, without interest, for ten years by the emigration society. Most of the settlers were so destitute that it was necessary for the men to earn wages in the nearby lead mines, the harvest fields, and wherever work was to be had, while some of the women and girls went into domestic service for a time to help out. Little by little they added to their holdings until the original colony, reinforced by those who

joined them year after year, filled and overflowed the boundaries of New Glarus and spread into adjoining towns.

For twenty-five years these people, like the balance of the southern Wisconsin settlers, relied upon the wheat crop for a marketable surplus. However, following old habit, since there was plenty of unused land, mostly covered with a fine growth of succulent blue grass, they raised cattle and milked cows. Butter being very cheap and having inherited the secret of making the Emmenthaler cheese, some of them tried this mode of disposing of their milk and found it would pay much better. Now ensued a friendly rivalry among kitchen cheesemakers to see whose product would bring the best price in Madison, Mineral Point, Galena, Rockford, or Milwaukee. Finally, following the practice which Yankees were introducing from New York, small neighbor groups of the Swiss farmers of New Glarus associated together and adopted the factory system. They manufactured, however, not the American variety, but European varieties of cheese, for which, acting cooperatively again, in ever-widening circles, they finally succeeded in establishing a world market.

From the middle seventies dairying proceeded at an accelerated pace. Its possibilities acted like a spur upon all farmers, large and small, toning up producing processes, stimulating improvement in the selection of herds, in their management, pasturing, and housing.

The farms of New Glarus were most numerous at the peak of the wheat-growing period, 1860-70, when the average size was only 126 acres. Twenty years later they averaged 170 acres, but 40 per cent were in the Census Bureau's large-size class, 175 and under 500 acres, while only 25 per cent had a smaller average area than 100 acres.

The Swiss settlers have displayed a canny gift for accumulating property and it was a rare case when a small farm that was offered for sale, by a would-be emigrant from the town, failed to be either united to one owned by a Swiss neighbor or bought in by such a neighbor for some member of his family.

Such purchases were financed locally. There was no formal organization for providing credit facilities, and New Glarus itself

had no bank until the present century. Their regular dependence, from pioneer days, was upon the members of their own social group who had prospered most and had saved money from which to make loans. In other words, New Glarus, as soon as it had shaken off its economic dependence upon the home canton in Switzerland, built itself up out of its own resources, employing a kind of "personality banking." For example, if a young man had established a reputation for honesty, industry, and thrift, whether on his father's farm or on that of a neighbor, he could be recommended for a loan somewhat like the Danish agricultural apprentice armed with some "master farmer's" certificate of competency.

The method was applied not only to land purchases, but also to improvements like the erection of cheese factories, barns, and dwelling houses. In due time the propaganda of farm experts on the subject of herd improvement through high quality, pure-bred, foundation stock, began to be taken seriously by these Swiss farmers, who, on the whole, have been somewhat conservative. This made another demand for credit to be supplied, as in the cases mentioned, from local sources. The results are apparent to the casual observer. It is only necessary to drive through the town on a summer day, noting the magnificent herds of Holstein cows in the meadows, to realize how far such improvement has gone within about a quarter of a century. The cows of New Glarus are now so much more productive than those of thirty years ago as to make possible a more intensive type of dairy farming which already has brought about some reduction in the size of holdings. It is found that a comparatively small farm will maintain a large enough herd to produce a generous living for a family, provided every animal is a star performer.

The New Glarus record of 1880 was but an earnest of what the town could do once the impetus imparted by the associative system of dairying and the wonder-working co-operative method of marketing had lifted these farmers over initial obstacles and set them on the path of quality improvement of their livestock. Four decades later, in the golden year 1919, to which farmers today look back so wistfully, the then 129 farmers of New Glarus

reported production values which averaged \$5,333 per farm, the largest, by more than \$1,400, of twenty-three Wisconsin towns compared. All of that income was made from livestock, and most of it from dairy products at the rate of almost \$160 per cow. New Glarus had more cows to the farm and more dollars per cow than any other of the twenty-three towns covered in this investigation.

The agricultural history of New Glarus throws light upon still another fundamental rural life question, in addition to those connected with farm areas, associative production, co-operative marketing, and farm credit. The Swiss and other settlers, as pioneer wheat growers, were wasteful and improvident of the soil. Not content to break up their naturally drained but fairly level, clayey uplands, they plowed also the steep slopes and the mucky bottom lands along the streams. So greedy were they for crops that, by 1870, they had under the plow 80 per cent of the land within their farms, proving that, as the saying goes, they must have cultivated some of their bluffs "on three sides." Ten years later tillage was restricted to 52 per cent, the balance being in permanent meadow or pasture, and in woodland. Their hillsides had stopped gullying, the soil now being protected by a thick sward of mixed grasses. Instead of raising field crops or tame hay on the alluvial bottom lands, at the risk of partial or total loss by the summer freshets, these now became the preferred pastures for the cows, where grass grew almost as luxuriantly as on the tide-flats of Holland.

The cultivated fields have been shrinking like the proverbial wet blanket, but the great, red barns, filled to bursting, the ample silos, bins of oats and cribs of corn, testify to the increasing productiveness of farms that are steadily becoming more agreeable to the eye. Here is a land of valley, hill, and stream; of field, meadow, grassy slope, rough and rocky wood lot; with good roads everywhere, excellent homes, schools, churches; a contented rural neighborhood possessing many of the requisites of the genuinely civilized life.

From the status of poor mountaineer peasants, the people of New Glarus have risen in less than ninety years to an economic

eminence attained by few rural communities in America. Yet their achievement has about it nothing to suggest farsighted planning or super-wise leadership. It is the natural outcome of a kind of instinctive attention, on the part of a group of common men, to a few factors which are permanent and fundamental. An avaricious quest for land resulted in dowering the great majority with farms large enough to insure a living income, while household economies were never abandoned. Thrift and self-sacrifice created the reserves of credit, dealt out on a basis of approved personality rather than acceptable collateral. Associated production was an importation readily naturalized in a homogeneous community, while co-operative selling was its corollary, as was likewise the effort to improve the bovine-producing unit, basis of all their prosperity. By conserving their lands under the dairying regime, the Swiss farmers pass on to future generations a rural life opportunity equal or superior to their own.

Is "agriculture at the crossroads?" From one point of view it has probably always been somewhere in that immediate vicinity, although its locus has not hitherto been ascertained with the precision implied in the phrase. Much has been said and written about the profits of farming on the new soils of America, often described as "dripping with fatness." "Little children here, by setting of corn, can earn much more than their own maintenance." This comes from a New England enthusiast within a decade of the first planting; and from that day to this men of his temperament have only occasionally intermitted the paeon whose chord was struck thus early. Not only independence, but fortune was thought to lie embedded in the miracle-working humus of America's woodlands, in the gray or black loams of our wide spreading prairies. Examples of riches won in their cultivation, like the stories of bonanza gold diggings, have kept the interest of mankind centered upon America's "inexhaustible" supply of fertile lands. The obsession has developed a psychology of hopefulness which has buoyed up ten generations of cultivators, the majority of whom must always have been counted unsuccessful from the strictly economic modern basis of judgment. From their own standpoint, of contentment with non-decorative comforts, and

the other satisfactions accompanying independence on a personally owned piece of land, they were not failures. At the worst, they had simply not "struck it right." Like a certain Grant County farmer of 1880, whose few acres of "galled and gullied hill-sides" and submersible bottom lands denied him a living, but who took his \$800 equity and in South Dakota built up a farm property worth \$80,000, they could always "go West." That spirit assimilates the American farmer to the mining pioneer. Like the miner, he was a prospector, listening for the whisper: "Something lost behind the ranges, Something hidden, come and see."

Depressions have come, depressions have gone, leaving with the homesteader the memories and the marks of hard times he weathered on the old frontier, or the pioneer sufferings he endured by escaping to a newer. The drought-complicated panic of the 1890's, occurring almost coincidentally with the passing of the free-land frontier, virtually closed the West as a refuge for the afflicted portion of the farming community. For one full generation the American people have been compelled to wrestle with the farm situation as a problem no longer soluble on the principle of *laissez-faire*. The nation and the states, Congress and the legislatures, have experienced the ever-growing complexity and insistence of the rural interest.

Amid the welter of contradictory suggestions for farm relief, it is comforting to assure ourselves that in one typical well-organized farming community, New Glarus, agriculture is not "at the crossroads." And courage rises with the thought that among hundreds of thousands of farmers similarly placed, rural life is not imperiled but resists the blows of fate at least as well as urban life, if not better.

If our appeal to history shall have brought us anything better than misleading echoes, the reasons for their immunity from the common distress should now be clear, and principles valid for a part are valid for all. That is what makes the present dynamic period so great a social opportunity. For, whatever means statesmanship might devise for the future stabilization of agriculture, either along the lines suggested or others, could be put into operation with better chances of success than at any time

since the barring of the West to farmer emigrants. Should it be deemed wise to establish a schedule for *normal farms*, under the several culture classifications, and to strive for a wholesale rectification of areas, now that every second holding is for sale the plan could be carried out. And whatever subsidiary movements might be found necessary—for more flexible credit, for the certification of apprentices, for co-operative mechanization, for marketing improvement, for soil conservation and forestry—the farmers, in this time of heart searching, should be ready to promote.

NEWS NOTES AND COMMENTS

GERMAN SOCIETY OF AGRICULTURAL HISTORY AND LITERATURE

Readers of AGRICULTURAL HISTORY will be interested in the work of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Literatur der Landwirtschaft, an organization with objectives similar to those of the Agricultural History Society. The German society owes its origin and development largely to the indefatigable and self-sacrificing efforts of the late Max Güntz (1861-1931). After many years of activity in connection with agricultural history and literature he became dissatisfied with the progress which was being made in the promotion of the historical approach to agricultural problems, and, after unsuccessfully attempting to utilize the existing agricultural organizations for this purpose, he formed the society here considered at Eisenach on April 11, 1904, with agricultural history and literature as its specific objective.

The activities of the Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Literatur der Landwirtschaft include the collecting and distributing of information regarding available agricultural literature, the fostering of interest in the history of agriculture, aiding in its research, and gathering its materials. The society is interested in all phases of agricultural history,—that is, the development of agriculture in all countries, provinces, and communities, as well as individual farms and families. It has taken a special interest in gathering the letters and records of Albrecht Thaer, the "father of the New German agriculture," and has sponsored the publication of *Albrecht Thaer; Nach amtlichen und privaten Dokumenten aus einer grossen Zeit* (Berlin, P. Parey, 1929. 266 p., illus.), by Walter Simons, on the occasion of the centenary of Thaer's death.

In seeking to fulfill its objectives, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Literatur der Landwirtschaft publishes a quarterly journal, now in its thirty-first year. Güntz inaugurated

the review called *Landwirtschaftlich-Historische Blätter* in 1902, its title being changed in 1913 to *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Literatur der Landwirtschaft*. Number 2-3 of the volume for 1931 contains an appreciation of the society's founder, entitled "Zum Tode des Begründers und Führers unserer Gesellschaft," by Dr. W. Seedorf. The same number includes an account of the work of the Agricultural History Society by the same author, entitled "Die Landwirtschaftliche Geschichts-Gesellschaft in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika," and articles by Dr. A. U. Moeller on "Der Einfluss der Bodenständigkeit auf die Geburtenhäufigkeit im Hannoverschen Bauerntum" and "Ehrung alteingesessener Bauernfamilien." Each number has a section devoted to comments on pertinent books and articles.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Literatur der Landwirtschaft has about three hundred members. Its officers are: Professor Dr. W. Seedorf, Göttingen; Direktor Ingenieur S. Gerstl, Wien; Geheimer Regierungsrat Professor Dr. Dr. h. c. J. Hansen, Berlin; Oberlandwirtschaftsrat Dr. F. Marx, Dresden; Direktor Ökonomierat E. Nipeiller, Ansbach; Kammerdirektor Hofrat Dr. B. Schöne, Dresden; Archivdirektor Dr. A. Tille, Weimar; and Generallandschafts-Repräsentant Dr. h. c. von Websky, Karlsdorf, Post Zobten. The chairman, Professor Dr. W. Seedorf, is an associate editor of *Agricultural History*. The business and editorial offices are at the Institut für Landwirtschaftliche Betriebs- und Landarbeitslehre at the University of Göttingen.—Everett E. Edwards.

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The United States Department of Agriculture Library has recently issued a mimeographed publication entitled "Agriculture of the American Indians; A Classified List of Annotated Historical References, with an Introduction," by Everett E. Edwards, as its *Bibliographical Contributions No. 23*. It has references on the following topics: Agriculture of the American Indians (General Historical References; Agriculture of Particular Regions and Tribes; Specific Crops; Miscellaneous; Agriculture on Indian Reservations in the United States); Uncultivated Plants used by

the American Indians (Food and Industrial Plants; Medicinal Plants). There is also an introduction of eleven pages and an index. Copies may be secured by addressing the Department Library or the compiler.

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